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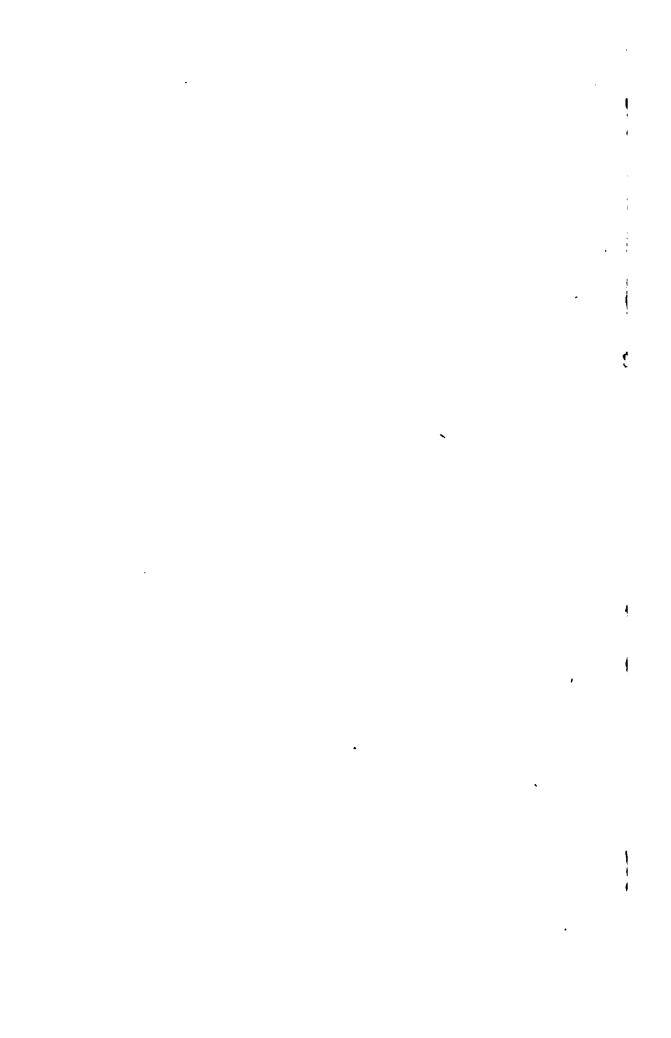
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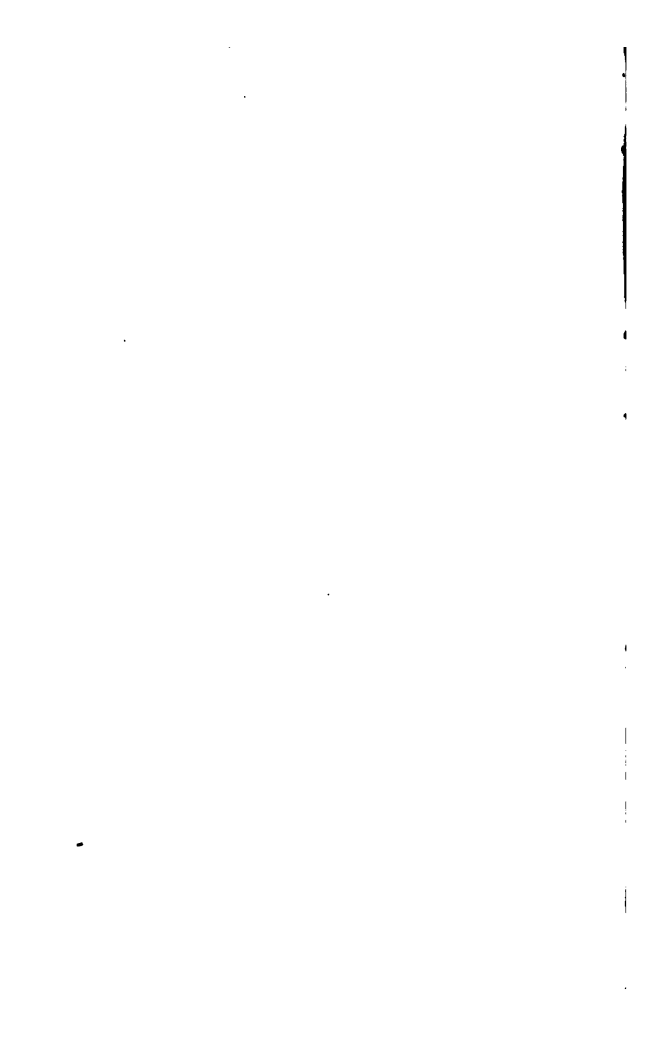
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CHARLES CHURCHILL



CHARLES CHURCHILL

VAGABOND POET

BY

WILLIAM HARVEY MINER
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CHARLES CHURCHILL
VAGABOND POET

163788

To

Her who has been a
constant inspiration

I.

"Churchill no more! O, cruel Death!
'twas hard
So soon to rob us of our favourite bard;
We should not thus bewail the fatal doom,
Hadst thou but plac'd an equal in his
room."

II.

"He's gone! great Churchill's gone! 'tis
true,
Yet cease the fates to blame;
Years they allowed him but a few,
But gave eternal fame."

III.

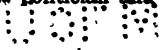
"Prose-driving dunces, waddling fools in
rhyme;
Scoundrels of every kind, by vengeance
led,
Spit forth your venom, poison all your
clime;
Churchill, who scourg'd you to your
holes, is dead."

—*William Cole* (1714-1782).

CHARLES CHURCHILL

THERE can be but little doubt that the character of Charles Churchill was moulded to a great extent by the age in which he lived. In the study of any classic work of art or literature which may have proceeded from a man or from a period peculiarly fitted for its production, it is essential that the environment be given due consideration, and if an unpleasant view of the subject has to be discussed, we are often able to gain a rightful understanding, because of the circumstances which may have surrounded the persons or events under scrutiny.

Such a statement seems to be especially true with reference to this poet, naturally endowed with power and talent, which, if they could have been used under more agreeable circumstances, would have placed him in greater favor today. He became, not entirely through fault of his own, an unfortunate politician and profil-



gate, and satirized that which at its best was none too good in an unscrupulous age, both from a literary and human standpoint.

In glancing back upon his career we can but be reminded of two later poets, Burns and Byron, and there comes to us a mingled feeling of sorrow, admiration, wonder and blame blended into a somewhat complex yet not unnatural emotion. Like both of these his life was unhappy and death occurred at an early age. His short career, while in a way triumphant, was checkered and his passions in no wise curbed. Power he possessed though in an uncultivated state, and his poetry may be looked upon as only a partial discovery of his genius; not unlike the others, his end was sudden and melancholy and today his reputation as well as future position in the history of English literature must be deemed uncertain. Yet again, as with the later poets, the very faults which were his, have been as so many marking places and kept him to a certain degree sure of his standing among that coterie of writers who helped

to form, what we may term for want of better expression, the "age of satirists."

Exactly one hundred years after the birth of Dryden, Charles Churchill was born, in February, 1731. As to a more exact date little seems to be known. Vine Street, Westminster, however, is the location in which the event took place; his father, after whom he was named, being at that time rector in Essex, as well as curate and lecturer of St. John the Evangelist, Westminster.

While in no way a remarkable man, the elder Churchill superintended the education of his son until, at the age of eight, he was entered at Westminster School, where, we are credibly informed, he gave no promise of that talent which was at a later date, to make him distinguished. Successful in gaining admission to Westminster at fifteen, there seems to have been but one event of any moment which marked his early career at this place. As a punishment for some misdeed he was compelled to recite in the school room a poetical declamation in Latin. This, to the astonishment of his masters and to the infinite delight of his associates, was

accomplished with an extraordinary amount of ability, gaining for the author a complete pardon for the misdemeanor as well as a certain standing with his fellows among whom ought to be mentioned the tremulous and bashful Cowper, the waggish Coleman and that brilliant light of a later day, Warren Hastings.

Churchill never entered the University. At the age of eighteen he tried for a fellowship at Merton College, but was defeated. Later he made efforts to matriculate at Oxford and failing here, he at length entered Trinity College, Cambridge, but becoming disgusted with all University life, returned once more to London, vowing vengeance, and later keeping the vow. For instance, he thus ridiculed those forms of admission in his "Ghost"—

"Which Balaam's ass
As well as Balaam's self might pass,
And with his master take degrees,
Could he contrive to pay the fees."

Soured by disappointment, Churchill at this time again returned to his father's house. Whether an actual want of learning, an early indulgence in satire, or some faults for which he may have been un-

justly accused combined in keeping the young man from entering upon a further academical course, we are not fully able to judge. Without doubt the real cause of his failure to gain admission either at Oxford or Cambridge was the fact that he had at an earlier date contracted an imprudent marriage with a young woman of Westminster, named Scott, which had been accomplished within the rules of the Fleet.

Needless to say the union was an unhappy one. It not only disqualified him as a student but introduced into his early manhood many responsibilities which were beyond his power to discharge or, indeed, comprehend. The parents on both sides were opposed to the marriage though the elder Churchill was later reconciled. For a year the youth remained under the parental roof but his stay terminated abruptly for reasons which are not known and he retired for some time to Sunderland, in the north of England, where he began a course of theological readings with a view to the Church, together with an enthusiastic study of poetry. At this place he remained till 1753, returning

then to London to take possession of a small patrimony which accrued to him through his wife.

Here we find him at the age of twenty-two, having been three years married. At this period the throne was occupied by George II, and the literature of the age was in a somewhat chaotic condition. From 1740 until 1760 the influence of Thomson and Gray seemed to predominate, and for the moment the sombre and solemn romantic school seemed utterly out of existence, though to glance ahead slightly, we might add that the popularity of such savage couplets which were being done by Pope, and later by Churchill, were of brief duration.

Among the remarkable scholars who had been at Westminster during the period of which we write, and who later became famous, were Bonnell Thornton and Richard Cumberland, as well as those previously mentioned, but possibly from the literary view-point, that one mild, shrinking, delicate lad, Cowper, entered more into the heart of Churchill than did the rest. In their earlier days they were

close companions, and the author of "The Task" repaid him in sore need.

Moreover it is certain that Cowper always upheld his friendship for the lesser poet, though the latter was profane in both literature and life; indeed he seemed to believe Churchill the leader of his time, though Goldsmith had then done "The Deserted Village" and "The Vicar." The two were of exactly the same age, and it is possibly because of their dissimilarity of character that they were drawn closer one to the other, and their friendship continued through life.

While not penniless at this period, we cannot find it stated that Churchill was well supplied with this world's goods. It was during this sojourn in the metropolis that he began to frequent the theatres and thereby came in contact with those worldly surroundings from which he was to obtain his earliest, and without doubt, most important laurels. We come upon results of his several months' close and careful observation of the actors of that age, collected as it were, and afterward sown broadcast as his genius might suggest in his later writings and "The Ros-

ciad," which aside from the "MacFlecknoe" of Dryden, "The Dunciad" of Pope and "The English Bards" of Byron, stands pre-eminent as the greatest of English satires.

Thus may we think of the big, awkward, clumsy, eighteenth century bohemian, seated in the pit at Drury Lane, or raised to the one shilling gallery of Covent Garden, silently shaping himself into what Gilfillan has termed "the greatest poet of the stage that, perhaps, ever lived."

It has been said that John Skelton (1450-1529) might be regarded as a rough prototype of our somewhat indecorous clergyman with, however, a rather more picturesque personification denied the latter and Dr. Gosse says that at a later period George Crabbe followed Churchill's versification, but be this as it may we know that during the second stay in London, the author of "The Rosciad" gradually developed for himself a style which was to be used to wonderful advantage and which became the envy as well as terror of many of his contemporaries.

Not yet however was he to be seduced entirely by the stage. Through the influence of friends he obtained the curacy of Cadbury in Somersetshire, and although without degrees, was ordained Bishop of the Bath and Wells, entering upon a career of ministerial work which, in the light of after days, seemed somewhat unusual.

Had circumstances been different there is little doubt but that his life would have been consecrated to the church and that he would have followed a calling which, though not greatly to his taste, would have been on the whole satisfactory. Because of his untimely marriage, increasing responsibilities and pecuniary embarrassments he early turned against the profession which he had adopted and to assist in the support of himself and family, opened a school which at first met with considerable encouragement, yet there is reason to suspect that not a few of his scholars imbibed some of the spirit of the future satirist, stirred possibly by his rod, with which, in a different form, he lashed his century and his fellow-men. During 1758 the death of his father oc-

curred and the son was chosen successor both in the curacy and lectureship and it is to be suspected that sermons carefully prepared by the elder clergyman were used to no small advantage by the new incumbent. According to some statements Churchill in later life, after establishing his own reputation, sold ten of these discourses for £250. Doubt has been expressed by those who have had the temerity to look through these, as to whether they were not taken bodily from some earlier divine; in any event they were of little value. Like William Godwin, who also succeeded his father in pastoral charges this accumulation of already used material was seized upon by Churchill and made to do duty a second time. Though dry and valueless, it was orthodox, and as such, appreciated by his parishioners; while this stock lasted his position was secure. As in the case of Godwin, however, his true personality was not relished by his audiences, and whether because of the lack of real piety or zeal, it was evident that his hearers preferred something which was beyond his power to produce.

While he speaks slightly of himself and his ministerial labors in one of his later poems, he seems to have at least played the part with outward decorum. His greatest objection to the position that he held was the salary which he commanded, scarcely £100 per annum, and this compelled him to resume the occupation of private tutor, at one time in a school for young ladies in Bloomsbury, and at intervals assisting whomsoever he might in a study of the classics.

So much for the life of drudgery, of hopeless struggle and misplaced ambition. From his advent at Westminster School until the age of twenty-seven this man had made efforts to gain for himself, if not a name, at least a competence, and his work to this period had been fruitless. While not naturally given to indolence, it can hardly be said that he had made the best of his opportunities and though willing to strive for himself he seemed to believe that the world was his debtor and that thus far he had not procured his share. The difficulties, real or fancied which had constantly loomed before him in whatsoever he may have attempted,

now seemed to culminate and become unbearable. His straightened circumstances had in many ways caused him to be not only morose and unhappy, but the mere contemplation of passing events seemed to spur him toward actions which were in no way fitting the life which he was supposed to lead. In referring to this interval in one of his after poems, he describes himself as a man without credit, his pride humbled, his virtue undermined and with a constant feeling that he was gradually sinking beneath an adverse storm which it was utterly impossible to quell. Another incentive toward an unclerical life may be based upon the renewal of an acquaintance, which shortly ripened into friendship, with one Robert Lloyd, a former classmate and son of Dr. Lloyd, one of the masters of Westminster School. Though brilliant and accomplished both at this place and at Cambridge, and later appointed an usher in his father's seminary, this young man had deliberately thrown aside what he termed drudgery, and with a thirst both for fame and pleasure threw himself into the literary world of that day. Possessed of

no real skill and with none of the genius of Churchill, he was little more than a clever copyist in such work as he did, and exerted from the beginning an influence upon his friend always for the worst. What small success he attained as an author he borrowed from his pseudo-clerical companion, though he invariably seemed to return infamy for good.

Gradually the work which was being carried on by Churchill in connection with the church, ceased. The two friends became inseparable and were nightly frequenters of the theatres, taverns and worse haunts, and each seemed to enter upon a wild career of dissipation. Unfortunately his wife, with whom he seems never to have been happy, made no efforts to check his rapid fall; indeed from such meagre accounts as can be gathered, she outran her husband in imprudence and extravagance and in this manner their affairs continued for some time going from bad to worse. On several occasions the debtor's prison loomed up before them both and in one instance relief was to be found only in the elder Lloyd who persuaded the creditors to accept

five shillings on the pound, he himself lending the required sum. It is said, however, that at a later date the whole amount of the original debt was paid by Churchill when in affluent circumstances.

Together with the newly formed love of indulgence there had also arisen the old love of verse. Coming in contact as he did with the wits of the day and being urged by Thornton, Coleman and others to attempt something of his own, he composed a poem in Hudibrastic verse entitled "The Bard," which was offered to Waller, a bookseller in the Strand, who rejected it without hesitancy. In no wise discouraged, he immediately began "The Conclave," a stinging satire against Dean Pearce of Westminster, a bitter enemy, and but for the intervention of friends who feared legal proceedings, this would have been issued. With his third effort and unquestionably finest work, he met with a success, far exceeding his own expectations.

This was "The Rosciad," written, it is said, after two months close attendance upon the play-houses. It was a time of considerable activity in theatrical life.

Drury Lane was at its best with Foote, Garrick, Mrs. Pritchard, Mrs. Clive, Palmer, Woodward and Yates. Even Covent Garden could boast of Mrs. Vincent, Macklin, Mrs. Cibber, Barry and Smith, and at times Quinn; with these and many others, the caustic wit of Churchill played relentlessly, though it is Garrick who must be looked upon as the principal victim.

We do not know to whom this was first offered but there is little doubt that it was refused by more than one of the booksellers. His price for the manuscript, Southey informs us, was five pounds, yet this sum seemed to strike terror to the hearts of all who were approached, until at length, unwilling to be baffled, the work was published at the expense of the author and printed and sold by W. Flexney, near Grays-Inn Gate, Holborn, in March, 1761. It appeared without the author's name and was heralded by two obscure advertisements. A few days only served to show that it had at least made itself felt, and literary London of that date was treated to a sen-

sation such as it always appreciates and revels in even at the present day.

But little time was necessary to convince the public that a new and powerful satirist had arisen and the effect of his work was extraordinary. The identity of the author was sought for in vain. The critics admired, though the victims raved, and the first issue was soon exhausted. With the exception of the *Critical Review*, directed by Smollett, everyone lauded the work. This periodical alone opposed general opinion and accused Lloyd and Coleman of having done "The Rosciad" for the purpose of self advancement, which fact in itself compelled Churchill to reveal his connection. This he did and at the same time prepared another and somewhat similar treatise. "The Apology," addressed to "The Critical Reviewers," which appeared during the following month. In its turn this acted as a new incentive to an already frenzied public, and Smollett was forced to write to the now famous author through Garrick, telling him that the savage critique was by another hand. Even Garrick himself, the hero of the first poem, was warn-

ed by Churchill that "men are mortal and that Kings may be dethroned" and had to make humiliating concessions to the heartless satirist. Strong and without fear he had to be, for many of his erstwhile victims had vowed vengeance and bodily harm. Invariably armed with a huge bludgeon, however, he continually went abroad and returned to his lodging unharmed.

In other ways his enemies were avenged. He had gained more than one thousand pounds by his two poems, which amount allowed him unlimited indulgence. He cast aside all restraint and wore instead of his clerical vestments a blue coat and gold-laced waistcoat. At this point "Anti-Rosciads," "Triumvirats," "Examiners," and "Churchilliads" were issued from all sides, yet they disturbed him but slightly. He separated from his wife, but arranged for her an ample allowance; his midnight potations became deeper, and more habitual—and the Bishop of Rochester in vain remonstrated. At length however, his parishioners took up the matter and with such vehemence that he was forced to resign his curacy and be-

come for the rest of his life a dissipated man-about-town, a vagabond poet.

Though Lloyd was still a close friend, he now formed an alliance with that abandoned debauché and notorious profligate, John Wilkes, a proper mate for such an apostate. Churchill helped him at various times on the *North Briton* according to correspondence now in the British Museum, and there is little doubt but that this intimacy was the most unfortunate of any that were formed by the poet. He at one time narrowly escaped imprisonment because of this connection, and then only through rare presence of mind. His popularity as a poet, or more properly as a satirist, was now at its height. Lowell, in his "Essay on Carlyle," 1866, speaks of the methods by which an author may make himself great and even justly so, by appealing to the persons of the moment, without having anything in him that shall outlast the public whim which he satisfies. Churchill is a remarkable example of this. He had a surprising extemporaneous strength of mind, or as Cowper said, "he undoubtedly surprised all contemporaries in a certain

rude and earthborn vigor," but no English poet seems to have enjoyed such an excessive and short lived popularity. To Wilkes he said that nothing came until he began to be pleased with himself; but to the public he boasted of the haste and carelessness with which his verses were poured forth under any condition.

"When the mad fit comes on I seize the
pen
Rough as they run, the rapid thoughts
set down,
Rough as they run, discharge them on
the town."

Much could be written of his wild thoughtless life at this time, of his satires directed upon Hogarth which caused a disturbance in the life of the caricaturist; and of the dissolute existence which he led with his mistress, Miss Carr, the daughter of a respectable sculptor in Westminster. One anecdote may be sufficient and this in itself throws some light on his unfortunate career.

Charles Johnson, a contemporary author and dramatist of some note, who by the bye, had been satirized in the "Dunciad" of Pope, wrote at about this period, a tale

fanciful in itself, and even today sought by lovers of the unusual. This was "Chrysal, or the Adventures of a Guinea" and in it he uses Churchill as the most prominent character, which at the best can but be considered a doubtful compliment. We quote here at some length from the book in question and also from Mr. Forster's essay on the poet, which will serve as an introduction.

"Whilst he was one night 'staggering' home, as the narrative tells us, after a supper in which spirited wit and liveliness of conversation, as well as rectitude and sublimity of sentiment, had gilded gross debauchery, a girl of the street addressed him. Her figure was elegant; and her features regular; but want had sicklied over their beauty; and all the horrors of despair gloomed through the languid smile she forced, when she addressed him.

"The sigh of distress which never struck his ear without affecting his heart, came with double force from such an object. He viewed her with silent compassion for some moments; and reaching her a piece of gold, bade her go home, and shelter herself from the inclemencies of the night, at so late an hour. Her surprise and joy at such unexpected charity overpowered her. She dropped upon her knees, in the wet and dirt of the street and raising her hands and eyes toward heaven, re-

mained in that posture for some moments, unable to give utterance to the gratitude that filled her heart.

"Such a sight was more expressive than all the powers of eloquence. He raised her tenderly from the ground, and soothing her with words of comfort, offered to conduct her to some place, where she might get that refreshment of which she appeared to be in too great want.

"'Oh, sir,' said she, pressing the hand that had raised her with her cold trembling lips, 'my deliverer sent you from heaven to save me from despair, let me not think of taking refreshment myself, till I have first procured it for those, whose greater wants I feel ten thousand times more severely than my own.' 'Who can they be?' interrupted he, with anxious impatience. 'Can humanity feel greater wants than those under which you are sinking?' 'My father,' exclaimed she, bursting into tears, 'languishing under infirmities, acquired in the service of his country; my mother worn out with attending on him, and both perishing of want, (heaven grant they are not already dead!) together with two infant brothers, insensible of the cause of their distress, and crying to them for a morsel of bread, which it is not in their power to give!' 'Where can such a scene of wretchedness be hidden from relief? I will go with you directly: but stop; let us first secure some comfortable nourishment from some of the houses which are kept open at this

late hour for a very different purpose. Come with me, we have no time to lose.'

"With these words, he went directly to a tavern, and inquiring what victuals were dressed in the house, loaded her with as much as she could carry of the best, and putting a couple of bottles of wine in his own pocket, walked with her to her habitation, which was in a blind alley, happily for her not very far distant, as weakness together with the conflict of passions struggling in her heart, made her scarce able to go.

"When they came to the door, she would have gone up first for a light, but he was resolved to accompany her, that he might see the whole scene in its genuine colors. He, therefore, followed her up to the top of the house, where opening the door of the garret, she discovered to him such a scene of misery, as struck him with astonishment. By the light of a lamp, that glimmered in the fireless chimney, he saw lying on a bare bedstead, without any covering than the relics of their own rags, a man, a woman, and two children shuddering with cold, though huddled together, to share the little warmth which exhausted nature still supplied them with.

"While he stood gazing in horror at such complicated wretchedness, his conductress ran to the bedside, and falling on her knees, 'O! Sir! Madam!' exclaimed she, in rapture, 'Arise! I have got relief from an angel of Heaven.' 'Take care!' answered a voice, the hollow trembling

of which was sharpened by indignation, 'take care it is not from a fiend of hell, who has taken advantage of your distress to tempt you to ruin! for with whom else could you be till this time of night? But know, wretched girl, that I will never eat the earnings of vice and infamy. A few hours will put an end to my miseries, which have received the only possible addition by this your folly.' 'He must be such, indeed,' interrupted my master, still more struck with sentiments so uncommon in such a situation, 'who could think of tempting her in such circumstance to any folly. I will withdraw, while you arise, and then we will consult what can be soonest done to alleviate a distress, of which you appear so undeserving.' While he said this, he took the wine out of his pocket, and giving it to the daughter, went directly down stairs, without waiting for a reply, and walking backward and forward in the street for some time, enjoying the sublimest pleasure the human heart is capable of, in considering how he had relieved, and should further relieve, the sufferings of objects so worthy of relief.

'By the time he thought they might have learned from their daughter the circumstances of her meeting with him, and taking some nourishment, he returned to them, when the moment he entered the room the whole family fell on their knees to thank him. Such humiliation was more than he could bear. He raised them one by one, as fast as he could, and taking

the father's hand, 'Gracious God!' said he, 'can a sense of humanity be such an uncommon thing among creatures who call themselves human, that so poor an exertion of it should be thought deserving of a return proper to be made only to heaven! Oppress me not, sir, I conjure you, with the mention of what it would have been a crime I could never forgive myself to have known I had not done. It is too late to think of leaving this place before tomorrow, when I will provide a better, if there is not any to which you choose particularly to go. I am not rich; but I thank heaven that it has blest me with ability and inclination to afford such assistance as may be immediately necessary to you, till means may be thought of for doing more.' 'O, sir,' answered the mother, 'well might my daughter call you an angel of heaven! You know not from what misery you have already relieved.' 'Nor will I know more of it at this time,' interrupted my master, 'than that which I too plainly see. I will leave you now to your rest, and return as soon as it is day.'

"'Speak not of leaving us, sir,' exclaimed the daughter, who was afraid that if he should go away, he might not return. 'What rest can we take, in so short a time? Leave us not, I beseech you: leave us not in this place!' 'Cease, my child!' interposed the father, 'nor press your benefactor to continue in a scene of misery, that must give pain to his humane heart.'

'If my staying will not give you pain,' answered my master, 'I will most willingly stay; but it must be on condition that our conversation points entirely forward to happier days. There will be time enough hereafter to look back.'

"Saying this, he sat down on the bedside, (for other seat the apartment afforded not) between the husband and wife, with whom he spent the little remainder of the night in such discourse as he thought most likely to divert their attention from their present misery, and inspire their minds with better hopes, while the children, all but the daughter, who hung upon his words, comforted at heart with a better meal than they had long tasted, fell fast asleep, as they leaned their heads upon their mother's lap. As soon as it was day, 'Now, madam,' said my master, addressing himself to the mother, 'I will go and provide a place for your reception, as you say all places are alike to you. In the meantime, accept of this trifle,' giving her ten guineas, 'to provide such necessaries as you may indispensibly want before you remove. When you are settled, we will see what further can be done. I shall be back with you within these three hours at most.'

"For such beneficence there was no possibility of returning thanks; but their hearts spoke through their eyes, in a language sufficiently intelligible to his. Departing directly, to save both himself and them the pain of pursuing a conver-

sation that grew too distressful, he went, without regard to change of dress, or appearance, to look for a proper lodging for them; where he laid in such provisions of every kind, as he knew they must immediately want. This care employed him till the time he had promised to return, when he found such an alteration in the looks and appearance of them all as gave his heart delight.

" 'You see, sir,' said the mother, as soon as he entered, 'the effects of your bounty,' but do not think that vanity has made us abuse it. These clothes, what we could raise on which has, for some time, been our sole support, were the purchase of happier times; and were now *redeemed* for much less than we must have given for the worst we could buy.' 'Dear madam,' interrupted my master, taking her hand respectfully, 'mention not anything of the kind to me, I beseech you. You will soon see such times again.' Then turning to her husband, 'I have taken a lodging, sir,' continued he; 'it is convenient, but not large, as I imagined would be your choice. I will call a coach, to take us to it directly. If there are any demands here, let the people of the house be called up, and they shall be paid. I will be your purse-bearer for the present.' 'No, sir,' replied the husband, 'there are not any. You have enabled us to discharge all demands upon us. People in our circumstances cannot find credit, because they want it.'

"My master would have then gone for a coach, but the daughter insisted on saving him the trouble; upon which he put the whole family into it, and walked away before them to their new lodging. It is impossible to describe what these poor people felt, when they saw the provision he had made for their reception. The father, in particular, could not bear it, but sinking into a chair, 'This is too much! This is too much!' said he, as soon as a flood of tears had given vent to the fullness of his heart. 'Support me, gracious Heaven, who has sent this best of men to my relief; support me under the weight of obligations, which the preservation of these alone,' looking round upon his wife and children, 'could induce me to accept.' Then addressing himself to my master, 'My heart is not unthankful,' continued he, 'but gratitude in such excess as mine, where there is no prospect of ever making a return, is the severest pain.'"

As we have stated elsewhere, it is our firm belief that the age in which Churchill lived did much toward moulding the character of the man. As at a somewhat later date London begot Richard Savage whose mode of life reminds one of his predecessor, so might others be named who were more or less influenced by the period during which they existed. Great

names there were, but also many which were vile. Outcasts such as Wilkes; pamphleteers like Tutchin, and even paid plagiarists abounded and the pages of Hogarth are but to be consulted for justification of any statement of this kind. All this, and more, was in evidence, and even while he may have donned the cassock, it is to be feared that Churchill did but little to add to the goodness of life. While he lived "he lived right merrily" and for his errors we make no plea of palliation, unless it be that restraining himself as a youth because of the lack of funds, he in after life gave full vent to the passions which made themselves evident at a time of greater affluence. At the worst he never seems to have been seduced into sin through vivid imagination. Naked sensuality he appeared to worship and his evils were perpetrated with the fullness of self knowledge. Moral sense he had, though surely blunted and many generous and good traits seem to have mingled with his excesses. Deliberately choosing Satire, usually personal, as his special forte, he won recognition where others failed, though in this we do not

contend that all satirists must needs be either very good or very bad men. Cowper and Crabbe are above criticism as to their modes of life; Swift, Dryden, and Byron might well be classed with Churchill. With a hatred of pretense, a robust and manly honesty, this poet lived and died. Morality and a true love of humanity he seems to have lacked as well as being destitute of a fear of God. The learned Dr. Johnson pronounced him "a prolific blockhead—a huge and fertile crabtree" and Christopher North in *Blackwood's* for 1828 gives vent at greater length to further calumny in this same strain. As the dead cannot retort, their statements must remain unchallenged though a formidable opponent would have greeted both had such remarks been propounded while he was yet in the flesh.

Churchill died on the 4th of November, 1764. Warburton says that he perished of a drunken debauch, a statement wholly unfounded. Best authorities tell us that he was taken with fever while on a visit to his exiled friend Wilkes, then at Boulogne, and in a rash attempt to return to

England, added to the disease which brought the end.

"What a fool I have been" were his last words, according to Davies, though this is contradicted by Wilkes. Garrick who was in Paris at the time, gave the news to Coleman, then mutual friends. Lloyd, at that moment ill, upon hearing of the death of his truest friend, never recovered from the shock and taking to his bed arose no more. Wilkes, while professing an unbearable grief, did not fulfil certain obligations, though he later caused to be erected a column to the poet's memory, and there is at the present time a tablet, inscribed in the church of St. Martin at Dover where the remains now lie. Thus while yet in early manhood he passed beyond the pale. Whether or not his life was justified, is for a higher court to decide.

Thus far we have sketched in outline the salient features of a career not wholly righteous. Anecdotes, apocryphal in themselves, might be added, as for example the account of his journey to Wales, and his setting up as a cider merchant, et

cetera. For articles dealing with those events and others of a like nature we would refer the reader to the *Edinburgh Review* of January, 1845, and to *Blackwood's* before mentioned. John Forster has given an appreciative account of Churchill and his work in his essay under that title, and there are several sketches included in the various editions of his poems, all of which are of interest, as are the numerous and in some instances lengthy recitals, in the several histories of England's literature by different hands, but it is evident that the subject has not been deemed worthy of serious attention, hence it is difficult to expand at great length.

A word as to the poetry and we are finished.

We have seen that he possessed a keen perception of character, especially its weaknesses, and beyond doubt a lively imagination and strong understanding of human nature. Wit and humor were also his to a certain extent together with an unlimited command of loose, careless though energetic diction, to which might be added self assertion and absolute in-



dependence. One thinks more of the pugilist than the poet, when he looks upon the literary arena of that day and realizes what strong blows were being dealt by this savage satirist. As compared with Pope his invective is less polished and without the point and sting of the delicate cripple, yet it reaches home and in many instances is as deadly. Churchill pours forth a torrent of blasting ridicule. Pope whispers a word in the ear of his enemy which withers the heart; Pope stabbed — the other used the broadsword — and both aimed to kill. Dryden was admittedly the favorite model of the lesser poet, and his versification is decidedly of the Drydenic type.

As Lowell has said, however, Churchill's poetry clung more especially to subjects of contemporary interest. The awful intrigues of Newcastle and Bute, the wretched squabbles of councillors and aldermen of that day, the petty quarrels of forgotten players, formed themes which, while feverish then, are forgotten now, hence the somewhat transient character of his verse.

Of "The Rosciad," his most finished production, we have no room for lengthy criticism or review. Many of its lines are memorable, many are not. "The Prophecy of Famine" on the other hand contains:

"No birds except as birds of passage flew"

and the famous line: .

"Where half starved spiders prey on half starved flies,"

but on the whole, this is inferior to other and less pretentious pieces of a later date. In "The Ghost" there is a picture of Dr. Johnson, well and carefully drawn, and we have no doubt but that the admirable lexicographer resented this with his most mighty heart and soul. Again in the "Dedication to Bishop Warburton" we feel a strain of terrible irony and sarcasm, the like of which could only be incited by that bitter enmity, which truly existed. His last production of note, "The Journey," is interesting not only in this sense but also because it contains some affecting personal allusions, and some

stinging scorn — moralizing we might term it at this day, showing that in spite of what had been done, good could be found in his breast, if but searched for.

Two other poems "The Author" and "Gotham" are usually included in the anthologies, and the former had the rare good fortune to please the critics. Less successful was the other, though there are some good lines, and indeed we might add to the list until the full catalog of titles (and there are not a great number) would appear. In this connection, however, we can but refer those who wish to make a close study of the man and his work, to some collected edition, and only ask that they look upon the poet and his defects with a kindly eye and "give praise where praise is due."

"Churchill the poet is dead," wrote Walpole to Mann on the 15th of November. "The meteor blazed scarce four years. He is dead, to the great joy of the Ministry and the Scotch, and to the grief of very few indeed, I believe; for such a friend is not only dangerous but a ticklish possession."

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